

# Strength Maintenance

## A Risk Management Approach

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THE U.S. ARMY MUST accomplish many evolving missions, encompassing everything from disaster relief to prosecuting the Global War on Terrorism. An all-volunteer multi-component force performs these missions. As Operation Iraqi Freedom intensifies and deployments lengthen, Army organizations are experiencing recruitment problems, and concerns are being voiced about soldier retention.

Until recently, all Army components have been successful in achieving recruiting goals.<sup>1</sup> In 2004, the Active Army and the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) met their recruiting mission. However, the U.S. Army National Guard (ARNG) did not: it fell 5,000 short of its recruiting goal for the year.<sup>2</sup> To help meet its 2005 recruiting objectives, the Army's recruiting command has lowered some standards for recruits.<sup>3</sup> Some have also raised the issue of reinstating the draft. While that might be an option, most Americans still support an all-volunteer Army.

### Strength-Maintenance Management Model

The Army's strength-maintenance program is designed to recruit quality soldiers, retain military occupation specialty (MOS)-qualified soldiers, and reduce first-term soldier losses.<sup>4</sup> The strength-maintenance management model offers a balanced approach to the development of initiatives aimed at recruiting quality soldiers. Its programs are designed to retain the maximum number of trained soldiers. Figure 1 shows the essential elements of the strength-maintenance program.

Equally important to strength maintenance are programs that would reduce attrition

while enhancing retention of trained soldiers. Attrition rates vary between Army components. A recent General Accounting Office (GAO) analysis of Active Army attrition rates found a first-term attrition rate of 39 percent for enlistees entering the service in 1995.<sup>5</sup> In fiscal year (FY) 2003, the Department of Defense (DOD) met its Reserve Component (RC) attrition goals, in the aggregate, with an overall attrition rate of 18.4 percent—the lowest since 1991. This lower rate is attributed to the Reserve Component's support of the Global War on Terrorism and the post-11 September 2001 implementation of stop-loss programs that minimize attrition in certain military positions.<sup>6</sup> However, as the Army struggles to meet all the demands placed on it, concerns are being raised about the percentage of soldiers who might leave the military rather than face further deployments.<sup>7</sup>

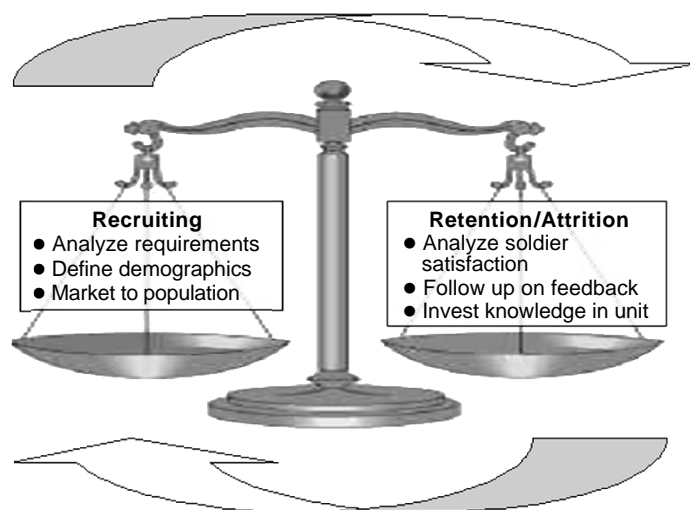


Figure 1. Strength-maintenance management model.

Operation Iraqi Freedom adds additional pressure to Army leaders who were already reexamining their terms of service to the Army. In 2001, the Army completed its Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) study that identified concerns about elevated attrition rates for commissioned, noncommissioned, and warrant officers.<sup>8</sup> The ATLDP study identified that Army downsizing, with the concurrent shift and increase in mission requirements, contributed to a zero-defects, micromanagement climate.<sup>9</sup> Some specific findings of the study that have affected retention rates include—

- High operational tempo (OPTEMPO).
- The officer assignment process. The process focuses on personnel management rather than quality professional development.
- Attrition of captains. Because junior officers are rushed through developmental leadership positions to fill personnel shortages, their ability to master tactical and leadership skills is affected negatively.
- Junior officer job satisfaction. Junior officers are concerned about their duties and the imbalance between the Army's needs and their family's needs.

While each component participates in recruitment, Army leaders are responsible for implementing retention and attrition programs in their units. Because attrition management is essential to force readiness, retention and attrition programs must be focused, appropriate, and productive. I propose applying the Army's risk-management process to a unit's retention and attrition program to achieve a more measured and consistent approach to the process.

As Field Manual (FM) 100-14, *Risk Manage-*

*ment*, outlines, the Army's philosophy is to integrate the risk-management process into all activities.<sup>10</sup> Risk management is the continuous process of identifying and controlling hazards to conserve combat power and resources. The six steps of risk management are—

1. Identify hazards.
2. Assess hazards to determine risks.
3. Develop controls and make risk decisions.
4. Implement controls.
5. Supervise and evaluate.
6. Assess reduced hazards.

## Applying Risk-Assessment Strategies for Retention

The science of risk assessment and management was developed to reduce unnecessary risk to soldiers during training and operations. The Army's policy of "training the way you will fight" is inherently dangerous. Identifying potential or actual hazards as well as steps leaders can take to minimize or eliminate the risk of those hazards produces manageable danger. Applying the same risk-assessment thinking to unit-retention programs means understanding the risks to retention associated with key factors that research has found most influences retention.

Controls are actions taken to eliminate hazards or reduce risk. The commander initially evaluates controls already in place to verify if they adequately address the risk. These controls take different forms, and each answers a question:

- Support provided. Is the type of support adequate to control the hazard?

Leadership Style	Group and Team Dynamics	Job Satisfaction and Training	Organized Unit Operations
Positive; experienced <sup>1</sup>	Social atmosphere <sup>2</sup>	Job satisfaction and variety <sup>3</sup>	Family or job conflicts managed <sup>4</sup>
Uses leadership principles <sup>5</sup>	Pride in unit <sup>6</sup>	Quality training conducted by competent instructors <sup>7</sup>	Operational and personnel tempo managed <sup>8</sup>
Moderate discipline, fair treatment <sup>9</sup>	Group cohesion <sup>10</sup>	Shared responsibility for training <sup>11</sup>	Equipment shortages addressed <sup>12</sup>
People v. task orientation <sup>13</sup>	Family involvement <sup>14</sup>	Personnel used appropriately <sup>15</sup>	Pay problems addressed <sup>16</sup>

1. R. Budin, *Trends in Attrition of High-Quality Military Recruits* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., August 1988).

2. McGovern.

3. Martin and O'Laughlin.

4. Mark M. Easley and Myron P. Viner, Technical Report 861, *Nationwide Survey of Soldier Perceptions of Reserve Component (RC) Training* (Washington, DC: ARI, September 1989); Burke K. Burritt, David W. Grissmer, and D. Doering Zahava, RAND Study R-2866-MRAL, *A Model of Reenlistment Decisions of Army National Guardsmen* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., October 1982).

5. J.M. McGovern, Report RA-202, *Non-ETS Attrition: Case Studies of Ten Army Selected Reserve Companies* (Washington, DC: Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense [Reserve Affairs], 1983).

6. Faris R. Kirkland, James L. Raney, and James M. Hicks, U.S. ARI Technical Report, *Reenlistment in the U.S. Army Reserve* (Washington, DC: ARI, July 1984).

7. Ibid.

8. GAO/T-NSIAD-00-110, "Military Personnel: Preliminary Results of DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members," statement of Norman J. Rabkin, Director, National Security Preparedness Issues, National Security and International Affairs Division, March

2000; Michael D. Matthews and John R. Hyatt, Research Report 1760, "Factors Affecting the Career Decisions of Army Captains" (Washington, DC: ARI, June 2000).

9. Timothy N. Martin and M. Shawn O'Laughlin, "Predictions of Organizational Commitment: The Study of Part-Time Army Reservists," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (1984); Hayder A. Lakhani, ARI Technical Report 907, *The Determinant of Job Satisfaction in U.S. Army Reserve/National Guard Units: A Multidisciplinary Analysis* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI), August 1990).

10. Martin and O'Laughlin.

11. Glenda Y. Nogami and David K. Horne, Research Report 1499, *Perspectives on Reserve Attrition* (Washington, DC: ARI, October 1988).

12. Nogami and Horne.

13. Ralph Katerberg and Peter W. Hom, "Effects of Within-Group and Between-Groups Variation in Leadership," *Journal of Applied Psychology* (1981).

14. McGovern.

15. Kirkland, Raney, and Hicks.

16. Kenneth K. Thomas, NPS-SM-95-006, *Leadership and Retention in TPU's: A Framework* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, August 1995), ii.

Figure 2. Variables influencing retention.

- Standards. Is the guidance or procedure adequately clear to control the hazard?
- Training. Is training thorough and recent enough to control the hazard?
- Leaders. Are leaders ready, willing, and able to enforce standards to control the hazard?
- Unit self-discipline. Is unit performance and conduct sufficiently self-disciplined to control the hazard?<sup>11</sup>

Commanders then determine how adequately existing controls reduce the risk the hazard poses. Following that determination, they might impose additional controls. To help identify hazards to retention, I summarize the relevant research that has been conducted in the last 20 years.

## Retention Research

As figure 2 shows, research sponsored by many different agencies and individuals identified reasons soldiers choose to leave or stay in the Army. I group

these into four categories:

1. Leader style, which relates to how positive a leader's attitude is toward soldiers and how much experience the leader has. Retention is influenced by how closely the leader adheres to well-established leadership principles; how discipline is applied; and the balance a leader maintains between being people-focused and mission-focused.

2. Group and team dynamics, which encompass how satisfying unit social relationships are; how proud unit members feel to be a part of the organization; how cohesive unit members feel the organization is; and how successful unit programs are in making soldier families feel a part of the team.

3. Job satisfaction and training, which includes whether soldiers are in the occupations for which they were trained and how well initial and skill maintenance training is conducted.

4. Organized unit operations, which address the soldier's perception of how efficiently and

Leadership Style Hazards	
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organization's culture emphasizes one type of leadership style over another.</li> <li>• Senior leaders do not understand differences and the effect of different leadership styles.</li> <li>• Leader training outside the institution is not considered necessary.</li> </ul>
Contingent Reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because behavioral and performance expectations are based on a negotiated contract involving rewards for successful performance, commitment to the organization might be limited.</li> <li>• Trust might be degraded if the performance contract is not honored.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Leaders might become overly reliant on this leadership style.</li> </ul>
Management by Exception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under constant threat of punishment, subordinates' stress will increase.</li> <li>• Individuals will experience increased job "burnout."<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• This leadership style contributes to attrition.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• This leadership style is associated with a higher intent to leave the organization.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Leaders might be reluctant to try another leadership style if short-term results are required.</li> </ul>
Transformational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders might be unfamiliar with this leadership style and unsure how to employ it.</li> <li>• Misapplication (when another leadership style would be more appropriate).</li> </ul>
Hazard Controls	
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge-sharing about the appropriate application and employment of different leadership styles is made available and its use encouraged.</li> </ul>
Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a published standard about the appropriate application of different leadership styles to which leaders are held accountable.</li> <li>• Criteria by which to evaluate different leadership styles are developed and applied in units.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training, modeling, and mentoring are available to leaders for the express purpose of developing a wide range of leadership styles.</li> </ul>
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commanders at all levels of an organization form a primary team, acquire knowledge of all leadership styles, and develop an organizationwide philosophy about employing specific leadership styles within each unit in the organization.</li> </ul>
Unit Self-Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unit leaders develop an understanding of the implications of short- versus long-term thinking and its effect on leadership styles and organizational culture.</li> </ul>

1. Peter Bycio, Joyce S. Allen, and Rick D. Hackett, "Further Assessments of Bass's (1985) Conceptualization of Transactional and Transformational Leadership," *Journal of Applied Psychology* (1995).  
2. J. Seltzer, R.E. Numerof, and Bernard M. Bass, "Transformational Leadership: Is it a Source of More or Less Burnout or Stress?" *Journal of Health and Human Re-*

*sources Administration* (1989).  
3. Kenneth K. Thomas and Bob Barrios-Choplin, NPS-SM-96-002, *Effective Leadership in TPU's: Findings from Interview at 16 Units* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, July 1996).  
4. Bycio, Allen, and Hackett.

Figure 3. The risk-management process and leadership style hazards and controls.

consistently the unit is run, problems are solved, and how OPTEMPO is managed.

Army leaders are acculturated to be decisive, aggressive, and to seize control. The Army has a bias for action. Army leaders who get things done quickly are valued for the results they can achieve. However, “going with the 80-percent solution” might not always be the best choice when crafting solutions to retention problems. Applying the deliberate, methodical risk-assessment approach to managing the variance within the factors I identified can help a leader manage this important problem.

**Leader style.** Different leader styles have different effects on short- and long-term goal accomplishment, the development of trust, how cohesive a unit might be, and the quality of unit performance.<sup>12</sup> Research conducted in the last 25 years has begun to define specific leadership styles and the effects of those styles on followers. Although some defining characteristics are still being debated,

leadership styles can be grouped into three broad categories:

1. The contingent reward, based on positive rewards for negotiated behavior.
2. Management-by-exception, based on threat of punishment.
3. Transformational management, which fosters commitment to leader and organizational goals, greater trust, innovativeness, and the ability to manage stress; higher performance levels in garrison and combat training centers; greater unit cohesion, this leadership style is related to subordinate satisfaction and a reduction in the intent to leave the organization.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 3 identifies leadership style hazards as well as controls a leader might use to mitigate the risk of these hazards to retention.

**Group and team dynamics.** Research indicates military teams perform more successfully when team members have an equal understanding of what

Group/Team Dynamics Hazards	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The type of people assigned to the team is inappropriate for the team's task or function.<sup>1</sup></li><li>• There is a lack of communication between team members and others outside the team.<sup>2</sup></li><li>• Task parameters are unclear or too broad.<sup>3</sup></li><li>• Team members are unclear as to their purpose; the team is not guided by an implementation plan.<sup>4</sup></li><li>• The organizational culture does not support the team's mission or team processes.<sup>5</sup></li><li>• Managers and management policies, procedures, and work practices do not support the team's efforts or impede the team's efforts.<sup>6</sup></li><li>• There is a lack of commitment by senior leaders to support the team's efforts.<sup>7</sup></li><li>• Rewards systems support practices that degrade team efforts.<sup>8</sup></li><li>• Insufficient time or money is allotted to support team efforts.<sup>9</sup></li><li>• Resources are not made available to support team efforts.<sup>10</sup></li><li>• Training or education is not provided or required for leaders and team members about group and team dynamics.<sup>11</sup></li></ul>	
Hazard Controls	
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognition is provided in a sincere, timely manner.<sup>12</sup></li><li>• Teamwork is encouraged.<sup>13</sup></li></ul>
Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Faultfinding and competition are discouraged.<sup>14</sup></li><li>• Trust is established and maintained.<sup>15</sup></li><li>• People-building is balanced with a concern for tangible results.<sup>16</sup></li></ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appropriate training on team and group dynamics is provided at all levels.<sup>17</sup></li></ul>
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leaders plan and study before starting and expanding team activities.<sup>18</sup></li><li>• Leaders up and down the chain of command understand and support team efforts to build, maintain, and sustain the team.<sup>19</sup></li></ul>
Unit Self-Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People-building is balanced with a concern for tangible results.<sup>20</sup></li></ul>

1. Diane D. Bandow, "Time to Create Sound Teamwork," *Journal for Quality & Participation* (Summer 2001). Teams might be members of a command group, staffs, temporary task-organized groups, or soldiers and their families.  
2. Becky Nickol, "Dysfunctional Teams," *Executive Excellence* (March 2000).  
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13-18. Ibid.  
19. Bruce S. Sterling and Kathleen A. Quinkert, Research Report 1730, "Review of Battle Staff Training Research at Brigade and Battalion Levels" (Washington, DC: ARI, December 1998).  
20. Adizes.

Figure 4. The risk-management process and group/team dynamics hazards and controls.

the task is and how they should interact to perform successfully.<sup>14</sup> How cohesive a team is contributes to the team's effectiveness, its ability to withstand stress, and its ability to sustain itself in the face of change.<sup>15</sup> Although some teams are able to self-organize and perform successfully, teams achieve effectiveness more rapidly when a leader provides team and group dynamics training.<sup>16</sup>

Healthy teams are building blocks to effective units; they foster and are fostered by cohesion. The desire to be part of a cohesive organization is an element important to the retention of soldiers.<sup>17</sup> Many external factors can influence Army team development: rank, branch, component, full- and part-time status, gender, race, family support, and so on. All can have an effect on how successful a team might be. Figure 4 identifies group and team dynamics hazards and controls a leader might employ to mitigate the risk of these hazards to retention.

**Job satisfaction and training.** A military unit's readiness to perform a mission depends on its members' individual and collective proficiencies and capabilities. A key factor cited in a number of retention studies was job satisfaction.<sup>18</sup> How satisfied a

soldier is in the job is related to how effectively the training he received prepared him to perform the job.<sup>19</sup> A related retention factor is whether individuals are performing the role for which they were trained.<sup>20</sup> Active Component (AC) and RC units must perform a variety of missions, and units in all components face challenges that can degrade a unit leader's training program. Figure 5 identifies job satisfaction and training hazards and the controls a leader might use to mitigate the risk of these hazards to retention.

**Organized unit operations.** Unit leaders balance providing effective leadership for unit members with making effective, timely, appropriate management decisions to maintain unit operations. In AC units, leaders have more time to spend on unit-management issues. The necessary staff members are present and resources are close by. Reserve units face additional management challenges because full-time support staffs vary between units, units might be geographically dispersed, or resources might not be available. Figure 6 identifies organized unit operation hazards and controls a leader might employ to mitigate the risk of these hazards to retention.

Job Satisfaction and Training Hazards	
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training is not offered in a soldier's military occupational specialty.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Equipment or training areas are not available.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Trainers are poorly prepared.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Adult-learning principles are not employed to develop training programs.</li> </ul>
Utilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soldiers do not perform the job for which they were trained.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Plans are made, then not followed; there is an atmosphere of crisis management.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Last-minute changes interrupt planned training.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
Hazard Controls	
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support plans for training are routinely developed and enforced.<sup>7</sup></li> <li>• Soldiers feel like they are achieving competence.<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>
Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training is realistic in terms of what can be realistically learned in the time available as well as accomplished in realistic battlefield conditions.<sup>9</sup></li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training is meaningful.<sup>10</sup></li> <li>• Soldiers feel as if they make progress.<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• Soldiers have a choice in what tasks they are trained in.<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unit leaders communicate training goals to senior leaders.<sup>13</sup></li> <li>• Training goals are mutually established and respected.<sup>14</sup></li> <li>• Unit leaders are provided the latitude to accomplish the goals.<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>
Unit Self-Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unit trainers employ adult-learning principles when developing training.</li> <li>• Appropriate planning is accomplished to schedule resources and coordinate training support.<sup>16</sup></li> <li>• Individuals are used appropriately in the occupations for which they trained.<sup>17</sup></li> </ul>

1. Kenneth K. Thomas and Bob Barrios-Choplin, NPS-SM-96-002, *Effective Leadership in TPU's: Findings from Interview at 16 Units* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, July 1996).

2-8. Ibid.

9. U.S. Army FM 25-100, *Training the Force* (Washington, DC: GPO, 15 November

1988); FM 25-101, *Battle-Focused Training* (Washington, DC: GPO, 30 September 1990).

10. Thomas and Barrios-Choplin.

11-15. Ibid.

16. FM 25-100; FM 25-101.

17. Thomas and Barrios-Choplin.

Figure 5. The risk-management process (job satisfaction and training hazards).

Job Satisfaction and Training Hazards	
Reserve Component (RC) Units or Multi-Composition Units with RC Soldiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-time technician or Active Guard Reserve support staff withholds information from part-time leaders.</li> <li>• Bad attitudes are allowed to spill over onto drill weekends.</li> <li>• Employers are not provided information about unit-training activities.</li> <li>• Last-minute changes are made, and soldiers are penalized for not being able to take time off from civilian jobs.</li> </ul>
All Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New soldiers are ignored; no "new-soldier" training or orientation programs exist.</li> <li>• Policies and procedures are outdated; there are conflicting versions; last-minute changes are made before major events.</li> <li>• Unit administrative support personnel are allowed to lose track of administrative and pay problems.</li> <li>• Equipment requirements and supply requests fall through the cracks; no one seems to know where the request went.</li> <li>• Unit gains a reputation for being chronically tardy in submitting reports.</li> </ul>
Hazard Controls	
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family and employer programs active and supported.</li> <li>• Soldiers have the right equipment and uniforms for the job.</li> </ul>
Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are clear procedures to solve pay and administrative problems; status of problems being solved is routinely provided to soldiers.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New soldiers oriented and integrated smoothly.</li> <li>• Multi-composition units' leaders are trained on unique RC soldier issues.</li> </ul>
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders recognize the importance of professional, respectful attitude and insist on maintaining a positive, supportive command climate.</li> </ul>
Unit Self-Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about unit activities published well in advance.</li> <li>• Clear policies and procedures are published and adhered to routinely.</li> <li>• Reports are submitted in a timely manner.</li> </ul>

Kenneth K. Thomas and Bob Barrios-Choplin, NPS-SM-96-002, *Effective Leadership in TPU's: Findings from Interview at 16 Units* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, July 1996).

Figure 6. The risk-management process and organized unit operations hazards and controls.

## Successful Strength Maintenance

A successful strength maintenance formula combines thoughtful analysis with the establishment of appropriate goals. Many factors affect a soldier's decision to stay committed to the Army. While some factors might be beyond the control of individual commanders, a number of factors that influence retention and attrition are under the control of unit leaders. By applying the risk-management process to a unit's retention program, leaders might identify more hazards to retention, and they might develop additional controls to mitigate risks to retention. In an Army of One, every soldier counts. **MR**

### NOTES

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